

Sahitya Akademi Award-winning collection of Oriya poems

DIURNAL RITES AND OTHER POEMS

J.P. DAS

Diurnal Rites and Other Poems is the English rendering of *Ahnika* a collection of poems written originally in Oriya by J.P. Das. Of the nine collections of poems of Das, this is the sixth, and has a thematic unity, veering around socio-cultural images of contemporary Orissa, and India. The poems are simple, lucid and transparent; at the same time poignant and transcendent. Some of the impressive archetypes relate themselves of folk traditions, and traditional arts and crafts, Socio-cultural concern is the major undertone among the poems, and the irony is sublimated, because the poems treat the collapse and decimation not with condescension, but with empathy.

Present collection which won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1991, is a collection of thirty poems which have emerged from the poet's fine observation of life and his responses to its multi-layered complexities.

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AND OTHER POEMS

J. P. Das

Translated by
Hrusikesh Panda



SAHITYA AKADEMI

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

J P Das has published eight collections of poems and *Anhika* published in Oriya in 1990 is his sixth. He is a versatile artist being a poet, story-teller, novelist, painter, scholar of folk arts and a film critic. Access to so many mediums is perhaps one of the reasons that his poems are lucid and not obscurantist. Poetic sensibility, social commitment, irony and angst, and an undercurrent of sharp intellect are some of the hallmarks of his poems in this collection. As is true of most of the writers in Indian languages, JP Das too thinks partly in English while writing, and this aspect of creation process makes English rendering of his poems easy in parts. When the references are pan-Indian as in *Gandhi, Mahabharat* or *Geetagovind,* no supplementary notes are necessary, at least for an Indian reader. But here too the translator has to decide which original expressions rooted in Sanskrit can be used for the cause of authenticity, and where such terms must be rendered into English for the sake of lucidity and of avoiding jarring dissonance.

There are many poems like *Bhubaneswar, Puri, Gopabandhu, Navagunjara, Kalahandi* and *Baliapal* where the places, myths, events or personalities are not known outside Orissa. A foot-note would have been a distraction and so has been avoided; but unless some information on Orissa is available, the poems would appear obscure to readers outside the State.

In the Oriya *Mahabharat* of Sarala Das (fourteenth century) there are many episodes which are not found in

the original Vyasa *Mahabharat*. One such episode is on *Navagunjara*. During the *ajnatavasa* of Pandavas, Lord Krishna appears before Arjuna in the form of *Navagunjara*, a strange animal whose body is composed of segments of eight different animals and birds and its right fore-leg is a raised hand of a woman holding a lotus. *Navagunjara* is a popular motif in Orissan folk painting.

Puri is the quintessential holy place of Orissa. *Madala Panji* is the chronicle of the Jagannath temple spanning centuries. *Aruna stambha*, the sun pillar stands in front of the temple. *Bada danda* is the road where chariots are pulled during the annual car festival. *Mukti Mandapa* inside the Jagannath temple complex is where brahmins gather and deliver decrees both on social and metaphysical issues. Hindus of Orissa believe that one cremated at *Swarga-dwara* in Puri, the cremation ground on the sea, attains salvation. Both in myth and in history, Lord Jagannath has governed Orissa's past. One myth is about the battle between Purushottam Dev, the king of Orissa and the king of Kanchi, when Purushottam Dev lost to the king of Kanchi. Then he took shelter of Jagannath, and Jagannath and Balabhadra rode a black and a white horse and fought for king of Orissa and made him victorious.

Bhubaneswar is another ancient temple city of Orissa but the ambience of this town is considerably mixed because this sleepy town is also the State's capital. Cuttack had been the State's capital earlier and *Balijatra*, the festival to commemorate maritime traditions of Orissa, is a major annual event of this commercial town. Mahanadi, the largest river system of Orissa passes by and

the town is located where Kathjodi branches off Mahanadi. Mahanadi enters Orissa from the western side in Sambalpur district which has been the granary of Orissa since Hirakud dam was constructed in the fifties. To the south-west of Sambalpur is Kalahandi, a district of denuded forests where starvation deaths are reported from time to time. Ironically Baliapal is one of the most fertile and green tracts of Orissa in coastal Balasore district, where Government is bent upon setting up a Missile Test Range by displacing the hard-working peasants from their prosperous lands. The peasants of the area have continued an unrelenting peaceful resistance against the government for several years and have succeded in foiling the designs of the government so far.

Jayadeva, the twelfth century poet of Orissa who wrote *Geetagovind* in Sanskrit, was not only a product of Bhakti movement sweeping the State then, he also in many ways contributed to the *Odissi* tradition of music and dance. Several expressions in *Geetagovind* have to be appreciated only in terms of Sanskrit aestheties.

Pandit Gopabandhu Das appeared in Orissa in the beginning of this century as a social worker of commitment. After appearance of Gandhiji in the freedom movement, he became a major freedom fighter of Orissa. He was jailed several times by the British including once because of his editorial 'Dangerous, if true' about police brutality in his daily *Samaj*. His popularity stemmed largely from his role as a social worker during times of natural calamities. He ran an *ashram* school for disseminating patriotism in a silvan campus of *tamala, bakula* and *chhuriana* trees. A patriotic poet par ex-

cellence, one of his famous stanzas rendered into English ran so :

Let my body commingle
with the soil of this country
and let people stride
across my back,
let every pot hole
on the road to swarajya
be paved with
my flesh and blood.

My endeavour has been to remain as faithful to the originals as possible; if such a course of action has robbed the poems of some of their original fluidity, I can still console myself that my intention has been honest.

HRUSIKESH PANDA

Contents

The Emperor

For the last time, Emperor !
Take a stroll around your palace
before you are swallowed up
in this interlude of history
and the time of the unquiet people
gathered on the streets.

Reminisce now -
about the time
when your coronation was celebrated
and how long your regimen lasted;
how many murders and pillages took place
amidst what bloodshed and slaughter
from ascending the throne
to a dubious death
in the distance between
the throne and the harem.

What more do you hope to behold ?
Your granary is empty ;
you had plundered your own treasury.
Your garden of delight
is devastated and reduced to cinders
with the sighs of the virgins,
whom you had kidnapped
to disprove your impotence.
Inside the exquisite cage
lies the corpse of your dearest bird
that your tender caress had killed.
Survey each spear in your armoury :

do you remember that each of them
had been a tree in the forest ?
The dice strewn on the floor,
had been pieces of martyrs' bones.
The skull that grins
from the mantelpiece
had been your court-jester
whom you had ordered beheaded ?

Now trudge down
from the court to your harem,
past the forest of spears,
and skip over
the spilled blood of martyrs,
step on the ashes
of armours and victory shouts
and pass through the ruins
of flags and war-cries.

A miscalculation
by the royal astrologer
dashed all your hopes
to conquer the world;
your royal horse
on its sojourn for *ashwamedha*
stumbled and fell dead
at the disputed boundary
of your empire.
You had slain every child
of every concubine
so as to ascend the throne
unchallenged;
but your family tree

is obliterated,
because your only heir
fathered by your body-guard
had been murdered
under your orders.

Your official biographer
living off your left-overs
has been crippled with paralysis.
Your courtiers and ministers
have deserted you
and joined the company
of the new imperialists
in search of newer colonies.
Your soldiers have taken shelter
in the armouries of war-mongers.
Your favourite queen
now sells her body
in a street of lepers.

What use looking back
at what has passed,
dear Emperor !
Retreat now,
before you and your empire
fade away even from movies.
Withdraw,
through the secret doors
of the harem,
into the blind alleys of history,
leaving your rusty crown
in the begging-bowl
of the royal foot guard.

Mahabharat

It is not possible
to live in exile
and don a disguise
for all times;
one has to return
to one's own land.

It is not possible
to remain neutral,
for here,
war is inevitable
and one has no choice
but to take a side.

Here, in the epic of life
all is written down :
for empire and power
the loaded dice of elections;
for the destitute,
a piece of land
as large as the tip of a needle
under the Land Reforms Law;
lac-houses of harijan colonies,
war-zones of farms and factories;
the *chakravyuha* of poverty and want
the unfailing *brahmastras* in the the armoury
of adversaries;
and the disrobed helplessness
of the lowliest and lost.

In diplomatic exchanges,
no principles are at stake.
The old and the venerable
beseech from the young
the inheritance of youth.
Honour is surrendered
in the fulfilment
of unjust promises.
There is assault and rape
in meeting halls.
Witnesses go blind.
Chastity is made divisible.
Licence and lust
are universally acknowledged.
Woman is mere womb here,
perfidy is routine
and prowess the only right.

In the *dharmakshetra*
of everyday life,
the siren is veritably
the blow of the conchshell
that sounds
the beginning of war.
The evening does not, alas,
bring its cessation;
it's only a respite
to regroup artifices
for the battle next day.
It is a war
bereft of all principles.
In this war,
to lose is the only sin.

The Revolution is Coming

After watching the movement
of stars and planets,
astrologers have fixed
the auspicious time;
venerable elders have already
blessed the occasion.
The revolution will surely come.

In the legislature,
a resolution to this effect
has been passed unanimously.
Formal permissions
have already been obtained.
The official gazette
has duly notified it.
The revolution is coming;
the revolution is coming.

Honourable judges
with a flourish of the pen
have banished poverty.
An ordinance has decreed
a three-fold growth
in the G.N.P.
Every river and rivulet
will now overflow
with milk and honey.
Antyodaya, the programme
for the poorest of the poor,
will be redefined.

and all men and women
will be declared equal.
The revolution will come,
yes, it will.
The revolution shall come,
yes, it shall.

No more tarrying.
Lo, the revolution is coming
and with what singular grandeur
and incandescent splendour !
It has already overtaken
the procession of paupers.
It is coming in the stacks
of spurious ballot papers
and the victory march
of the winning candidate.
It comes setting fire
to the hovels of *harijans*.
Revolution is coming
in the empty slogans
and multiple resolutions
in conferences of intellectuals.
The revolution is coming
in the dazzle of black money;
in the dreams of lotus-eaters;
and in velvety reveries.
The revolution is coming
in the bidding of brokers;
in the yellow headlines
of hired newspapers.

Roads are chock-a-block

with arches, buntings
and floral decorations
to welcome the revolution.
Holding lamps and blowing conch-shells,
ladies from respectable houses
await as they were ordained
in their dreams.
A new temple has been built
for Karl Marx
and a new priest engaged.
Get ready with flowers.
and sandalwood paste,
with incense and camphor garlands.
No one can now stop
the coming of the revolution.
The revolution is coming.
yes, it is coming.

Devi's Advent

When she came this time,
there was no holy conjuction
of stars and planets;
the moment had not been predicted
as particularly auspicious.

Without waiting for decorations,
leaves and flowers
pedestal and throne,
gold foils and neon lights,
ignoring the sound of bells
she came ceremonyless.

She annihilated the demons
Chanda, Munda, Shumbha and Nishumbha;
with her lesser cohorts
chandis and *chamundas,*
she vanquished Raktavirya.
Now a whirlwind showed the way
towards an incorrigible deluge.
The lion raced ahead unbridled
at two hundred kilometres an hour.
From the dark clouds of *Mahakala,*
the Insufferable Eternity,
she descended on dear earth
with sword and skull in hand,
garlanded with bleeding heads,
chunks of flesh, bowls of blood,
tongue lolling with desire.
She came with trident,

cobra and thunder,
spear, noose and bludgeon.
She came with
destruction in her eyes
incineration in her breath,
her only desire
devastation.
The land was ravaged,
maps were torn to shreds;
land and water
became indistinguishable.
New and nascent rivers,
rivulets and estuaries
and vales came up.
The earth was crusted
with barren sands.
In the blind eyes
of hurricanes
the very signs of existence
were lost.

She consecrated herself
in the midst of expansive
oceans of water,
with hymns
of tragic ululations,
with bells of evening worship
of woeful sighs,
and in the piteous hymns
of wails and yowls.

Bhubaneswar

There is no elation,
no excitement.
The sun rises from behind
the curtains of history,
passionless.
Beyond the air-strip
jackals go on howling.
Morning breaks in the state's capital
to the ringing of bicycle bells
and the bustling crowds
in front of fishmongers'.
Gates of offices open
to the sound of morning bells
and cymbals from temples.

The main avenue
paved with concrete
distances the old from the new.
Telephone wires
disrupt the conversation
between the *yaksha*
and the *salabhanjika*.
Neon lights obliterate
the twilight amazement of the sculptures.
Headlines of newspapers
render meaningless
even the most poignant
denouement of myths.
Festivals of pay-days
are over in no time.

Genealogy of kings intermingle
with the write-up on cabinet ministers.
On the battle ground
of the Kalinga war descend troops
of floor-crossing politicians;
and on the unpredictable days
of decision-making,
they take shelter
in the dustbins of the State Museum.

Beneath torn cinema posters
a tired cow ruminates.
In front of *paan* shops
the Future of the Country
stand and stare
at the Industrial Acre.
Ashok and Kharavela
are evoked no longer.
Beyond the Employment Exchange,
the car stops
at the portals of a hotel.
Wheels of a rickshaw
gauge the ups and downs
of social consciousness.
Beggars emerge
out of ancient historic caves.
On archeological rubbles
master plans are made
for a bank building.
A tourist's camera
traps the essence
of *Ashokastami* and *Shivaratri*.

Dust gathers on files.
The pinnacles of temples
go on gazing vacantly upwards.
The afternoon flight takes off.
Revolution happens
only in slogans
splashed on walls,
as clerks march out
their heads bent,
from their offices
silently homeward.

Empty House

Once again I come back
to the laboratory
of my self-inflicted punishments.
For an undisturbed analysis
of my every conduct
I had sought this loneliness,
with no one around,
where, in mutual silence
the tea gets ice-cold.

But where is the seclusion ?
For the cursed sea-farer,
voyages never end.
From one room to another
there is no island for shelter.
Though the sky is unlit
and the stars have set,
there is the warmth
of many possibilities
on the abandoned bed.
I touch an object
and the world vanishes.
Everything disappears
like a row of lights
coalescing at a distance,
like a pair of parallel lines
merging into a point
like the suburbs blurring
in the city's horizons.
But when they move away,

the scenes look back
and nudge the eyes.
Agitated q.e.d.s
point fingers at questions.

There isn't any empty space here.
Nothing is improbable.
The room becomes a desert;
cobwebs weave themselves
on the ceiling;
outside, the lawns
turn into wasteland;
houses crumble into rubbles.
On an empty chair,
my skeleton reclines.
My secret-most passions
fill up with emptiness.

The house is brimming with the hope
of your return.
The walls display
the fragility of your promises.
The keenness of my desire
only highlights my helplessness
to bring you back.

In the self-contained
emptiness of this place,
my loneliness gets crowded
with the meaningless compulsion
of my need to return here
again and ever again.

Steps

Within this short distance,
there is no auspicious beginning
of a journey; no arrival.
Only a stone floor
eroding away in the legends
of destinations.
The fuddling feet
of the traveller,
one behind the other,
register the progression
from departure to arrival,
from womb to funeral pyre,
from the frolicksome floor
to the transcendence of the zenith.

The explorer's sighs blanch
the faith of the maps.
The determined pilgrim
loses his way
in the maze of faithlessness.
Remorse darkens
the excitement of arrival.
What sort of heaven is this
where there is no change,
the season always spring
and from branches
laden and burdened,
ripened fruits do not fall
to the ground ?

What is the use
of counting the steps,
whether there are twenty
two or thirty-two,
whether they lead to paradise
or to the ocean depths,
whether the last slab
of stone in the staircase
is for arrival
or for departure,
whether the house is dark
or the roof brightly lit,
whether the road leads
to a poisonous well below
or to the pole star above,
to the senility of life
or to the virginity of death ?

In ascent and descent
the journey waxes and wanes.
Nights pass
waiting for the sun.
Feet amble along
and the passage
does not put a stop
to the repetition
of assorted journeys.
There are footprints
all along the way.
The steps see all :
that which is not plain,
nor even and flat;
that which is both

above and below,
that which is
the unachieved ambition
to arrive at either end,
an ambition now bottomless
and ossified,
and that which is
an endless sphere
of non-attainment.

Puri

Everything here
is cloistered in myths.
Tretaya and *Dvapara*
are sunk under sands.
The pages of *Madala Panji*
have grown yellow
and flaked with age.
Characters from history
ride into folk-lore
on black and white horses.

Every step here
leads to the life after.
Thoughts are choked
in the narrowness of the streets.
Even as spring shines
on the wall-paintings,
ruins of *bhajans* melt
in the harsh sun-rays.
Counterfeit coins
given to beggars glisten
on the burning sands.
Beneath the chariot wheels
are laid waste
the loneliness of crowds.

Everything coalesces:
visor, visual and vision.
An invisible hand of faith
covers the eyes

of propriety and modesty
with a black band of devotion.
The moving tunes
of devotional songs
accumulate like dust
on the icons.
A blind man stands
with folded hands
in the shadow of *Aruna Stambha*.

Bats flap their wings
on the ceiling
of the *Bhog Mandap*.

The devoted lose their way
and wander into
the inner courtyard.
The icons blink
from the darkness
and another aeon passes.
The present times
are spent in worries
over previous and future births.
Polemics over
the form and the formless
are resolved amicably
on the dusky floor of *Mukti-mandap*.
The place is complete
and self-contained
in the benign figure
of the headless icon
and the perfect body
of only two round eyes.

Shadows move away
from the *bada-danda*
towards the *swarga-dwara*.
Darkness descends
on the cloistered pining
of casuarina trees.
Daru, the Block of Log floats
on the deluge of oceans.
With a gentle knock
of rolling waves,
the sea narrates
to the unmoved shores
the metaphysics
of the ultimate truth.

Curfew

Houses are arranged
in two neat rows
like tombstones in a cemetery.
The street lamps are in attention
like soldiers with rifles.
The siren proclaims
prohibitory orders
and heavy boots march
on the chest
of the quiet city.

Windows and doors are closed
and there is
an impossible heaviness
in the air.
Colours fade away
at the limits of the sky
in the tense noon of terror.
Whispering voices of fear
cloud the sunny day.

The eventless day grows
in the blank pages of newspapers.
Blood dries
on the road surface.
Smell of gunpowder
disappears from the air.
A kite circles
from the safe distance
of the sky.

In the graveyard
of narrow streets gather
the ashes of garbage
and bones and skeletons.
Packs of stray dogs
seize the city.

With bloodied feet
the sun walks across
the dead valley of the city.
Trapped screams echo back
to the control room.
Feeble protests of sighs
get sprayed in the sky
like futile dots of stars.
Tanks roll down
the main streets
wiping off the protests
of the moonbeams.

Navagunjara

With whose face, and body,
with what secret fantasies
the painter decorates the one
beyond appearances ?
Whose unfathomable illusions
decend from the brush
to materialise on the ground
like wild illustrations ?

You are destined
to be put to test,
for ever.
As soon as you rise
from meditation,
you have to penetrate
through his disguise
and realise the relevance
of the one who has come.
In every ordeal
you have been subjected to,
you have to escape the punishment
of yet another exile.

Arjuna awaits his final deliverance
through meditation of atonement.
In the days of banishment,
disguises are beyond discovery;
but the ascetic easily recognises
from beneath the wild veneer
the Universal Being's migration

from one body to another.
He accepts the appearance
of the bizarre and exotic,
lays the bow on the ground,
welcomes with bowed head
the kaleidoscopic divinity
manifesting itself
in many a form.

Once it is realised,
the secret of the cohesive body
is fragmented.
The limbs are restless
with helpless aggression
and futile violence.
Just one raised hand
humbles the beastliness.
Everything coalesces
in peace and harmony,
in the tender compassion
of a lotus flower.

Cuttack

Everything comes back
to the mind
once I am here.
Everything comes back :
the lolling days
of writing love poems
in notebooks,
pockets filled with
the gentle breeze of spring,
times when one could get lost
gazing at the sky,
days when one could
gift away handfuls
of soft sunlight.

I can remember
familiar old faces.
They who lingered behind
in the enchantment
of picturesque days,
watching rainbows
from river-side benches.
They, who stayed back
in the crowds of *Balijatra*
while waving colourful scarves,
in the sad moments
of coming out of cinema halls,
eyes filled with tears.

Today when I take a step ahead

a saree-end from the rickshaw
wraps up the multi-coloured feelings
which one had left behind.
The traffic stops
at the level crossing;
the swarm of vehicles
choke my consciousness.
My eyes stop
at the two mutating shores
of the street.
The mind accepts silently
the inevitability of ageing.

Everything appears familiar,
the way the sunshine
jumps over the river bank
and stealthily enters through the window
A beggar sits at the kerb
staring at the rags
of clouds in the sky.
The snapped kite alights
on the crumbled roof.
The sacramental water
comes out of the temple
and enters the open sewer.
Amidst the confusion
of makeshift shops,
justice is bought and sold.
Rain washes away
the rituals of the Chandi temple.
Discussions come to an end
in the tea shops in College Square.
The terror of Deluge

Overflows Kathjodi banks
and wipes away the voice
of the newspaper hawkers.

As I walk away
from the hospital road
my feet stop at the crossing;
every road from here
leads to forgetfulness.
The man who is going away
does not look back;
he gathers palmfuls of water
and offers it to the ancestors.

Meanwhile, the summer
has left and merged
with the moist intimacy
of untimely rains.
As lamp-posts grow in age,
fading memories
play hide and seek
in the mazes
of lanes and bylanes.
In the embrace
of the two rivers,
the city squats unmoved.
While the world
remains the same,
it is history which changes
and changes yet again.

The Dancer

In the darkness of the stage
another universe appears
like a fugitive star;
its ethereal advent
possesses her.
At the epicentre
of the fiery circle of light
she phosphoresces
as her face explodes
with the ecstacy
of burning meteors.

Her every movement
and every glance
is a distinct *mantra*.
In the symbolic essence
of every physical nuance
there is an intimate message
for the world at large.
Her finger points
at an undiscovered galaxy,
and the geometry of her footsteps
decides the equilibrium
of the different worlds.
The quest of her eyes
leads to the other side
of unrealised horizons.

There is no hindrance;
the endless expanse

of ascending music
opens the orbits
to yet unknown spaces.

The meaningful rhythm
of her *ghunghroo*
drives her steps
into faster circles
and flags the greater
purposes of life.

The stage is inundated
with timeless intimacy.
The thrill of the auditorium
merges with
the ecstacy of the skies.
At this effulgent
and predetermined moment,
she returns to the wings,
leaving a temporary void
in the wonders of space.

Death-throe

What all comes to the mind
just before death:
the house, the family,
the near and the dear ones,
sorrow and happiness,
childhood wonders,
the shrinking fiery circle
of misadventures,
playful noontime
without a care in the world,
a sad night asleep
in the fog of fear and sorrow,
or the faded time
having no beginning
nor any end,
floating away
in the incessant current
of the river ?

What does a man think
at the hour of his death ?
Bobbing up and down
in his hackneyed existence,
the strange feeling
of having touched the moon,
the despondent years
of the future
compounded with
the speed of cyclones,
the stories of undiscovered

continents in the world,
the unfulfilled
promises of history,
the paradise
bedecked with imaginations,
the secret hymns
pronounced again and again ?
Whose face is it
that appears
at the time of death,
the first demon
of the fairy tale,
gods and goddesses,
kinnaries and *gandharvas,*
behind attires and masks
and disguises,
laughter and tears
bitterness and repentance
faith and hatred and disbelief;
changing faces
known and unknown
and half-familiar
on clouds and walls and lakes,
faces vacillating
between recognition
and blankness ?

Or, perhaps nothing
at all.
The sky not a sky,
the cloud not a cloud,
mornings and evenings
are bland falsehoods.

Everything is a detached
uninvolved state,
void of memories,
void of feelings.
There is no semblance,
no feeling,
everything is beyond appearance.
Everything is inside you,
alone, excluded
and unaccompanied.
Nothing is visible,
nothing can be remembered,
except a blinding light,
a light assembled
from fragments of darkness.

Kali

The raised foot points
towards eternity.
The fiery eyes aim
at the brink of devastation.
The angry sabre in the raised hand
fells every shelter of the future.
The swooping arc of the spear
tears into shreds the last hopes
of humble devotion.
The garland of bleeding heads
display the ravages
of savage war-cries.
There is bloodied terror
in the hibiscus offering.
An unredeemable curse
clings to the sword.
Inescapable thorns of prickly pears
pierce and imprison
peace and benediction.

Every river and spring
crossing her path dries up.
Death, famine and epidemics
sweep over the land
miles and miles around her.
At the deserted corners
of a rotting sky
colours disappear.
The raging fires in the forests
burn down every bird and animal.

Every smile is afflicted
with the cruel heat of noon.
The crescendo of apparitions
drives away a nervous sun.
The anger of swords and skulls
darkens the days of terror.
Salutations of the cursed
vanish in the heartless hymns
of consecration.

A hand is raised
and a foot points ahead.
There is all-consuming hunger
in the animal anger of the tongue.
The incandescent look of the skull
pierces the empty spaces
and reduces to cinders
the grains of charity
and forgiveness.
Blessings are lost
in the forms of malediction.
Black times seize the days;
the moon is put out
in its own darkness.

Ominous nights reign now.
Hibiscus flowers float
on rivers of blood;
ululations are nailed
onto cactus thorns.
In piteous voices,
devotees pray to be saved.
Animals trudge on obediently
towards their assigned altars
for the final sacrifice.

History

There are no witnesses
here any more.
Achievements are immured
in palaces and caves.
Proofs of excellence
are recorded
on commemorative pillars
and the *Kamasutra*.
The desire for immortality
is petrified
in the citations
of inscriptions and edicts.

There is no word
of caution here,
nor any moral lesson.
That events take place
as contingents
is acknowledged unanimously.
There is no dearth
of logic and explanations
or justification.
There is a slot for everyone
in the bottomless pit
of obscure history.

In the successful hands
of the court pundits,
chapters get amended.
Saints and heroes gravitate

from the headlines
to foot-notes and appendices.
A strange conspiracy of events
pick up a forgotten villain
from the dustbin of time
and catapults him
to the throne above.

The country, the time
and the people survive
in characters, covenants,
draft compromise deeds,
blind alleys, trap doors,
secret chambers, arrows,
cannons and hydrogen bombs.
In the sacrifices of *ashwamedha*
and atomic weapons,
the limits of existence
are determined.
Beneath the crowding
shadow of excitement,
the civilisation grows older.

People standing outside
stare with unconcern
at the successful events.
By the hands of capable people
newer chapters are written
only to be offered
to omnivorous worms of time.

Statues and replicas
pretend to originality.

Jesters become serious
and bestow philosophical meanings
on their silly jokes.
Everything finds its way
into the moth-eaten pages.
Scholars of the future
continue to wait
with undeciphered alphabets
in their hands.
Tragic anecdotes
that had already happened
are enacted yet again
as burlesques.

Gandhi

The experiments with truth
turned into slogans.
The philosophy of life
remained stuck
to the blind eyes of statues.
Success remained delimited
to mere definitions.
The soul was taken over
by gross merchandise
of opportunism.

For the establishment of *dharma*
war was declared.
For maintaining peace
bustees of *dalits* were burnt.
With the support
of devious scriptures
truth was asked
to prove itself.
The men of god
were made outcastes.
The lowliest
moved even further away.

There is no one now
in quest of truth;
no one is bothered
about the means any more.
Everyone has his eye
on counterfeit results.

In the profit and loss
of black markets
the last capital of goodness
was squandered away.
In search of new colonies
imperialists marched away.
Awards for peace
were bestowed on war-mongers.

The old pocket watch
cannot overstep
the lines of poverty.
The horrors of picturesque truth
cannot be seen through
the thick pair of spectacles.
The small piece of loin cloth
cannot hide the vulgarity
of limitless power.
The walking stick cannot stop
the aggressive violence
of extremists.

When the clocks fall silent
and their hands move no more,
when history takes leave,
he comes out yet again
from the confines of statues,
movies and anniversaries
and takes another brief stride
towards the raised rifles
of new assassins.

Geetagovind

This is such a garden
of creepers and bowers
whose design is inspired
by arcane rites of *stambhan,*
vashikaran and *sammohan.*
Its four sides are fenced
with esoteric ecstacy;
the five senses
are its foundation.
The moment you enter here
the sky is enveloped
with longings;
darkness deepens
like secret desires;
one's entire life
is offered
at the graceful lotus-feet.

Bodies pervade all.
Sleepless hours of the night
meander through thighs
breasts and lips.
In the bed of buds
and folioles,
morning alights
in fluttering eyelashes,
dishevelled plaits
and unruly strands of hair.

And then sulkiness

and disappointment,
raving and repentance,
remourse and sighs.
The helpless *sakhi* keeps on
carrying messages
through the various moods :
from the charmed
to the radiant,
from the witty
to the enraptured,
from the pining
to the estranged.
The arrows of *Kandarpa*
find their target
in the bushes of *madhavi*,
navamalika and *ashoka* -
the two intense bodies
united in separation.

Darkness comes again
like fire raging in the veins,
embalmed in musk and vermillion
and sandalwood and collyrium,
the scarf flowing
and the waist band quivering,
in the subdued chiming
of ear-rings and anklets.
The unbridled mind pauses.
flighty, flitting and fervent,
yearning and pining,
in the arbour
of cloves and *tamala,*
of the flame-of-the-forest

and *bakula*.
The body overtakes
all self-restraint
and life wallows
in lustful passion,
in wanton quavering,
and in the end,
in ecstatic collapse.

At the end of it all
everything is dishevelled,
tired and soaked in sweat.
The sun correlates
the senses and the mind,
the present life
with rebirths.
The morning paints the breasts
with sandalwood and vermillion paste,
and bedecks the body
with golden bands around the wrists
and silver armlets and anklets.
Now there is neither body,
nor desire nor courtship,
neither love-making
nor the angst of separation.
There is only a fluid feeling
of eternal change
and the reign of poetry,
a festival of words and rhythms,
where *raag* and *taal*
are the rulers.

In the dulcet empire

of the bower,
the poet lolls,
sovereign of his inspirations;
as in the Yamuna of his psyche
the tender verses
bring in a deluge.

Fear

Fear is the pre-historic darkness
lurking in the lanes
and by-lanes of the town
when you have fifty grands
in your brief-case.

Fear is the off-spring
of King Kong
who emerges from childhood fables
and beats his chest
on the roof of the concrete jungle.

Fear is the ring of the telephone
hammering the heart
in the voice of the dreaded boss
at odd hours.

Fear is the telegram
at midnight
which arrives
inside a closed envelope
when the near and the dear
are far away.

In the still mid-day,
fear is the thumping in unison
of heavy boots
in times of curfew
in the lanes of impotent men.

Fear is the hushed whisper
of tense and uneasy days
when uniformed soldiers
armed with bayonets charge
into dispersing processions
after slogans of protest
have gone silent.

Fear is the roaring
of the motor-bike
emerging from the temple
with a masked face
when names have been entered
in the hit list.

Fear is the witness
of your ignominious past
surfacing suddenly in the mind
back from banishment
looking for atonement
for the sins of the past.

Fear is the imminent
possibility of death
leaping out of the mirror
as the vacant moments of time
draw wrinkles on the face
at the indulgent moments
before the dressing-table.

Fear is the tenuousness
of relationship that hangs
from the everyday discordance
eternally afraid
of snapping itself.

Diurnal Rites

Days arrive thus
and pass by
in the lanes of the city,
day after day,
month after month,
from one season to another,
leaving behind heaps
of collective emptiness.

The sun rises
obscuring tne lamp
burning erringly,
in the curling smoke
of coal stoves,
bringing astonishment
on the tea cups
from behind
bloodied headlines
of newspapers.

The morning joins the crowds
at road-side water-taps.
The morning
is heard in the 9 o'clock siren,
in the clangorous din of machines,
and then at
boards the office-time bus.

Morning lengthens
in front of ration-shops,

spraying colours on posters.
Morning stops the forenoon shadows
like the traffic policeman
at the road-crossing,
and conceals the harsh noontime
with dark sun-glasses.

Noon slides along the sweaty back
of the rickshaw-wallah;
noon flies off
with the dry leaves on the roads;
noon disintegrates
with the melting asphalt,
and goes back in the emptiness
of deserted streets.

In the afternoon,
people amble back
from offices and factories,
tiffin-boxes in hand.
Evening perches
in front of the *paan* shop.
As a girl waits
near the movie hall,
the day's light fades away
in the ghetto's chorus of sighs.

Lampposts are reborn.
The day departs
sullen and vexed,
into the still darkness
taking the first available night train.

The Ruins

What could you speak
to the walls
of the disintegrating castle,
and in which dead language,
with the help
of what listless interpreter ?
What elucidation can be sought
from the non-existent moats ?
Where will you seek justification
for which deviousness
of statesmanship
in clashing class struggles,
in what stones and marbles ?

How many centuries back
who ruled here,
what currency,
in which year of reign
what proclamations ?
Who had come
riding horse, elephant or tank
in a procession of chained slaves ?
Who established his sovereignty
in the merciless savvy of the gallows ?
Who, again, slipped away
through the secret door
in the disguise of a woman,
dodging the midnight assassin ?

There is no valour

in the crumbling bricks.
Plants germinating on stones
have no future.
There is no need any more
for the cannon
on the cracked dome,
for the fading letters
on copper-plate inscriptions,
the broken chains of the door-less prison,
for the stone-edicts covered with moss
establishing the tyrant's reign.

The falcon will fly away
carrying the yearning sighs
of the queens.
The sound of trotting horses
would be lost
in the thin howl of jackals.
Walls would bend forward
to welcome
the procession of time.
Stones shall crack
protesting against
royal injustice.

No one would record again
the golden ages
submerged under soil and rubbles,
betrayals lurking behind
wild bushes,
victory celebrations
turfed with grass,
proclamation of war

lingering at cracks on the walls,
genealogy dangling from cobwebs.

The visitor who had come
for picnic
would step on fragments of history
and peep
through the cracked doors
into the castle,
seeking lessons
from the past.
In the apathetic,
sullen noon-time
echoes would go on revelling;
but legends would refuse
to wake up.

My Next Poem

My next poem would come
from forgiving compassion
after two love affairs
and three separations;
it will descend
from the sky of sighs
as the entreaties of placation
for the first love.

In the repentance
of faded relationships,
the poem will come
stretching a hand of friendship,
it would rearrange
the changed affinities;
it would make
compassionate flowers of understanding
bloom on the graveyard
of distrust and disbelief.

In some vexed afternoon
of a sterile sky
it would come as the memento
of green memories,
exalting echoes of tunes,
forgotten in the deep
solitude of the mind.

It will come leaving behind
star-crossed fate,

as intense faith
in propitious moments,
keeping the fickle future
mesmerised in the eyes,
drawing new and auspicious
fate-lines on the palm.

It will come
in the turbulent existence
of evil times,
crossing the lamentation
of despondent wastelands,
gifting away handfuls of laughter
in the free kitchens,
flooding the mirage
with torrential rains.

It will come
in the sacramental morning dip,
chanting the hymns
of benediction and peace,
stunning the darkness of temples
with reforms unheard of,
snatching away murderous weapons
from the hands
of harbingers of death.

It will come
in the soft wings of doves
over-flying the bomber planes
through the war-torn sky,
carrying the agreement
for ceasefire,

in the successful signature
of disarmanents;
it will come
as the cold flare of peace
on the heap of explosives
of violence.

It will come
felling the prison walls,
disobeying prohibitory orders
of autocratic governments.
It will march
on the main thoroughfares,
silenced by curfew orders,
leading processions
(albeit illegal)
with slogans
distributing fiery pamphlets.

My next poem will come,
its steps in consonance
with peace march
to the Noakhali of xenophopia,
singing *Ramdhun*
in the midst of communal carnage,
baring its chest
to the guns of terrorists.

My next poem will come
gently gleaning
sharp arrays of words
unresisted, unworried,
easy and spontaneous,

evading the strait-jackets
of rhythms and rhymes,
in the self-governed empire
of blank sheets of paper
conferring the status of axioms
on the right to existence.

Dharmyuddh

The temple keeps standing
facing heaven-ward.
In the recondite security
of the place of worship,
priests keep busy
in their intrigues.
Messages of discordance
flow in the resonating
recital of hymns.
In the *sanctum sanctorum*
strategies for the war
are given finishing touches.
The temple-flag
scatters rage and fury.
The fragrance of resins
blows away self-restraint
and fellow-feeling,
as the temple bell announces
the time of the battle.

The chief ecclesiasts
assemble on the sacred platform
and elucidate on the semantics.
Humming hymns-of war cries
sabre-rattling ascetics
emerge out in hordes
to re-establish
the reign of *Dharma.*
Advocates of peace
are ostracised

by the elder ecclesiasts.

Hymns and war-cries
crowd the lips.
With trident and rifles,
bedecked with garlands
of *tulsi* leaves and bullets,
blind warriors of jihads
and religious war
hunt for heathens.
They set hovels to fire,
they knife to shreds
the chests of children;
they molest women
so as to establish
the gospels.
These men of god have
anger and execration
in their eyes,
violence inside their bosoms,
and arrogance on their lips.
Their fingers point
at anarchy;
the faithful hordes follow
singing *bhajans* of animosity
in their inevitable march
towards devastation and death.

In the ominous moments
of the night,
mercenaries and brokers of religion
calculate their profits and losses.
Clutching on to their blind faiths

and drugged with opiates,
the faithful followers and devotees
sleep snugly.
Blind-folded with religiosity
they sow the seeds of destruction,
they who call themselves
administrators of *dharma*,
those harbingers of death
who come riding menacingly
on obstreporous motor-bikes.

Sleep Does Not Come

The stars lie inert
in the sky;
the moon perches oblivious
on a heap of clouds,
and an expansive stillness
pervades the sky
and the space beyond.
The midnight meteor
has disappeared from sight
after lighting up
the paved path of memories;
and sleep does not come.

The songs were littered
on the kerbs;
birds returned to their
own unblemished silences;
the beggar scraped together
his world of rags,
and the children soared
into the magic of lullabies;
every bell in the temple
lay languid and dumb,
everything crumbled
and burnt away,
in the chirping
of nocturnal cicadas.
Sleep does not come,
sleep does not come.

There is a drizzle
of familiar faces;
the childhood river banks,
soaked in affection, flood over;
stanzas of forgotten songs
float back
arranged in a new rotation;
forbidden gates open into the maw
of secret darkness;
fairy-tale oceans part
and treasure-chests unlock;
sleep does not come,
sleep does not come.

Unsaid words come back
wearing masks.
Enormous giants of the past
knock at the heart-beats,
unseen hands terrorise
the blind alleys of the city,
the mysteries of locked houses
strike the mind with fear,
unsolved riddles
ride by in a procession,
the unconscious is surrounded
by mistakes and remorses,
and blood runs cold
and the heart-beat slows down,
but sleep does not come,
sleep does not come.

Mantras and *sahasranams*
are of no use;

no good are sedatives,
the hymns of *Rigveda,*
nor counting of sheep.
From one edge of the bed
to another restless side,
rolls a turbulent past
and an uncertain future.
All the felicitations
for the soul of the night
and imprecations against
an insatiable fate
coagulate inside the bosom,
but there is
not a wink of sleep.

The night of mystery
grows in age.
The breath is restless;
body and mind
fatigued and depressed.
The rooms of memory
are crowded.
Unwelcome events
enter unbeckoned,
as the faces and feelings
you look for
have disappeared.
Someone's absence
takes away the dreams
from the eyes
at the restless moments,
and sleep does not come;
sleep does not come.

Mahanadi

From the blue-crimson
thirsty valleys,
it emanates like a
self-juvenating blessing.
Remnants of folk-tales
and ancient history
are its assets;
it takes birth
in folk-lores
and comes forth
out of the dark of history,
from one amnesia
to another myth,
following oracles
of the pious and the saints.

In the unsolicited distance
between innocent spontaneity
and visionary feelings,
are lost the *Omkar*
and the summer solstice;
forests and villages and fields
are left in the background.
At the enchanted moment,
when temple bells chime,
it plunges
into the eager plains.
Where does it then flow,
in search of
what expiation,

onto what annihilation,
lost in what serpentine desires,
in what cantos
of which parables and epics,
what nightmares
does it dissolve ?
There it goes
swinging on the excitement
of seasons,
floating in the faraway
lonesome songs,
stumbling against
the chirping of cicadas,
marching through the din
of swarms of people,
spilling over stones,
rolling over sands,
in the condensing circle
of star lights.
It crosses steps
and bathing *ghats*
leaving behind forts
and temples,
imprisoning mountains,
in the placid ardour
it washes with the pure ease
of good-intentions
the contamination
of settlements.

At some dispersed moment,
the liquid armours of the deluge
reassemble and engulf

in dissolving violence
the piety and the achievements
of ancestors,
the city and its greenery,
the life and its
antiphons of victory.
It again brings
itself to equilibrium;
distinguishes between
sins, holiness and penance,
sorrow and destitution,
charity and the competence
to disperse piety,
and returns back
to death its blind shelter.

Everything is harmonised
in the green eagerness of the earth,
between depression and death,
between promise and outcome
between probability and success,
floats, gets swept away,
coalesces and is submerged.

Yet incessant
beyond water, current,
flood and deluge,
it mingles the limited realisation
in the universal knowledge;
it comes from the subconscious
of selflessness
and finally meets its end
in sovereign empathies of the soul.

Hiroshima

It had been
a wonderful morning;
but nothing remained the same
when the day was over.

In that exciting sky
of limitless possibilities,
there took place
an explosion of intelligence;
but alas, there was
no imprint of culture
nor any warmth of intellect
nor any dazzling
proclamation of progress.

Or was it only an infernal doom
that tears apart
the mass of land,
that soils the tomorrows,
obliterates the good omens
of horoscopes,
the fates of people,
the laughter of toddlers,
and the achievements of ages ?

A robot god comes
and uproots all accomplishments,
sweeps away prosperity
and immaculations
underneath ruins,

imprecates the inheritors,
proclaims a universe
void of soul,
where power is omnipotent,
where mankind is
just a statistics
in a laboratory
and perhaps only, hopefully,
a footnote in history.

In this one day-end,
finished and obliterated are
not only a habitation
but the entire world
and humanity
that had flourished
and had grown with time.

Our civilisation today
is only forty years old.

Kalahandi

Put away the road maps now.
To go there,
you do not need
helicopters any more;
wherever there is hunger,
there Kalahandi is.

The god of rain
turned away his face.
There was not one green leaf
left on the trees for supper.
The whole village a graveyard.
Cracked ground,
drab river sand.
All the plans failed;
the poverty line
receded further.

Wherever you look,
there is a Kalahandi :
in the sunken eyes
of living skeletons,
in rags which do not
cover the frail bodies,
in the utensils
pawned off for food,
in the crumbling huts
with unthatched roofs,
in the exclusive prosperity
of having owned

two earthen pots.

Kalahandi is there everywhere :
in the gathering of famished crowds
before charity kitchens,
in market places
where children are auctioned off,
in the sighs of young girls
sold to brothels,
in the silent procession
of helpless people
leaving their hearth and home.

Come, look at Kalahandi closer :
in the crocodile tears
of false press statements,
in the exaggerated statistics
of computer print-outs,
in the cheap sympathies
doled out at conferences
and in the false assurances
presented by planners.

Kalahandi is very close to us :
in the occasional contrition
of our souls,
in the unexpected nagging of conscience,
in the rare repentance
of the inner self
in the nightmares
appearing through sound sleep,
in disease, in hunger,
in helplessness,

in the abject fear
of an impending bloodshed.

How could we then walk
into the celebrated portals
of the twenty-first century,
leaving Kalahandi behind ?

Gopabandhu

On this crossing,
staring at the emptiness
how long will you go on standing,
Gopabandhu,
in sun, rain and cold,
in floods and deluges,
in famines and hard days ?
How long would you remain
imprisoned behind iron fences,
in birth and death anniversaries,
in the dust caked on your statue,
arrayed in wilted flowers ?

From inside your new goal,
dear Gopabandhu, do ponder
over your country once again.
Who will fill up,
with his flesh and blood,
all the potholes which dot
the roads to self-rule ?

The injustices and oppressions
of today are as true,
as they are terrible;
who will look at them
with tearful eyes,
who will oppose them
with raised fists ?

Mounted there without rent,

you will be tired, Gopabandhu,
no one will fetch a chair for you,
everybody is pre-occupied here
with his own chair.

Watch the people walking past
without looking at you,
clutching on to the change
in their pockets;
no one has his eyes
on the mountain peak,
all their gazes are cloistered
only in themselves.

Everything is spoilt and ruined,
dear Gopabandhu, sir,
your hermitage
of *tamala* and *bakula*
and *chhuriana* trees,
your restraint and dedication,
movement to build awareness,
vows, principles and ethics.
The country drifts away
towards cataclysm,
and truths are imprisoned
in yellow pages of newspapers.
Ideals have been lost
beneath the morass
of anti-culture.
Nationality has been cremated
at the narrow borders
of caste, race and communities.

Standing all by yourself,
what more do you hope for,
Gopabandhu, sir ?
Step down once again
from your pedestal
at the crossing,
pulverize yourself,
so that your body
commingles again
with the soil of the land,
and let the countrymen
march over the bridge
of your bleached bones
towards the *swarajya*
of your ideals.

Two Birds

One

Standing on a heap of garbage,
he pretends as if
he would pluck the sun
from the niche of the sky,
and proclaims proudly
the arrival of the morning
with the cacophony of arrogance.

And then,
the whole day long
he keeps chasing shadows.
Wearing a red crown,
head held high
he paces up and down
with hauteur,
even though
no one turns round
to look at him.

No one stares at him,
oh no,
no one bothers to listen.
The sun completes
its diurnal rotation.
The bird falls asleep
near the garbage heap,
satisfied and satiated,
tucking its vainglory

within its feathers.

Two

To all and sundry
it preaches moral lessons
and the essence of knowledge.
But then,
it dashes against the lights
and retreats hastily
to the inauspicious
corners of darkness.

Behind the bowers
of thick leafy trees,
it sits silently
through the whole day,
closes its eyes
and pretends philosophy,
to hide away
its own blindness.

Quiet is the interior
of the hollow of the trees,
and there is no one about.
Yet, in a meditating gesture
it casts scholarly glances
consoling everyone
with its head
nodding knowledgeably.

When the last light
has been extinguished

from the tree-tops,
it emerges from its hole.
It gathers with its claws
all the superstitions,
and hopping from branch to branch,
it scatters them
all over the land
with scoops of darkness.

Within Reach

You open the door
and there is the world,
with ocean and mountain,
forest and lake.
You open your eyes,
and there is the sky
and the moon and the sun
and the planets and the stars;
you step on the ground,
and there is heaven,
and nectar and *apsaras*
and the paradise.

You stretch out your hands
and reach out to amity.
A single glance
ushers endearment
and love blooms
in the first letter.
The slightest touch
ensures surrender.
You close your eyes
and dreams come flooding.
Every *mantra*
leads to *moksha.*
Each breath
brings in *nirvana.*

The lines on the palm
are the inevitable future.

A flick of the thumb
determines life and death
in the amphitheatre.
You stick out the hand
and the traffic stops.
You blink,
and the world of magic
disintegrates.
The dice slips off
from the palm
to precipitate
the war of Mahabharat.
You touch the button
to unleash the world war.

One cross mark
on the ballot paper
leads from democracy
to dictatorship.
A symbol of the palm
governs the fate of the nation.
The surrender is complete
with one signature.
The whole city gets extinct
with one atom.

The fist holds
fate and future.
The expanse of the sky lies
at the edge of vision.
The hands of the child
are in those of the mother.
The index finger of the assassin

is on the trigger.

One waits to see
if an amazed moon
would come down
into the baby's tender hand
with a lullaby
or would crash down in fragments
with a single bullet.

Baliapal

One man's revelry
is another's death -
that is how the pieces fall,
at Baliapal, Baliapal.

Baliapal is the shrine
where pilgrims go;
it is not *Kurukshetra*,
only a *dharmakshetra.*
Before you enter Baliapal,
you must take off your shoes,
throw away all weapons
come to this sacred arena
bowing your head,
and with folded hands.

Baliapal is verily
the testing-ground of truth,
the touchstone of justice,
the range of public opinion,
the laboratory of non-violence.
Baliapal is the ultimate battle:
between people's power
and the power of the State;
between righteousness
and recklessness;
between barbarity and humanity.

Baliapal knows not
where America is

or what is Russia,
where is Hiroshima
or what is Pokhran.
Baliapal only knows
what is hunger,
and how much makes
two handfuls of rice.
The peasant here recognises
clouds and rains
and smell of earth,
trees, crops, drought and locusts.

Baliapal is the future time
and here, the peasant
is the sovereign lord.
There are no weapons here,
no bullets, no armies
nor any cold war;
here only soil and water
and trees and creepers;
earth green with crops
and the existence
of indomitable people.

You may uproot
the paddy saplings
and plant rifles here;
you may scatter gunpowder here
instead of fertilizer granules;
instead of water
you may irrigate
the fields with blood;
but you will find,

what Baliapal's soil
will sprout in the end
is paddy stalks
and not inter-continental
ballistic missiles.

J.P. DAS (born : 1936) Oriya poet, playwright and short story writer was educated in Utkal and Allahabad Universities. He is the author of nine collections of poems, five collections of short stories, four plays, a historical novel and a book of poems for children. His works have been widely translated and his plays have been performed in different parts of the country, besides being broadcast on radio and television. A Ph.D. in Art History, his scholarly works on Orissan Art include *Puri Paintings* and *Chitra-pothi*.

English translation of his works include : *First Person, Love is a Season, Timescapes, Silences,* all collections of poems; *Before the Sunset* and *The Underdog,* plays; and, *The Magic Deer, The Forbidden Street, The Spider's Web,* collections of short stories.

Having given up career in the IAS to devote himself to full time research and creative writing, he works and lives in New Delhi.

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